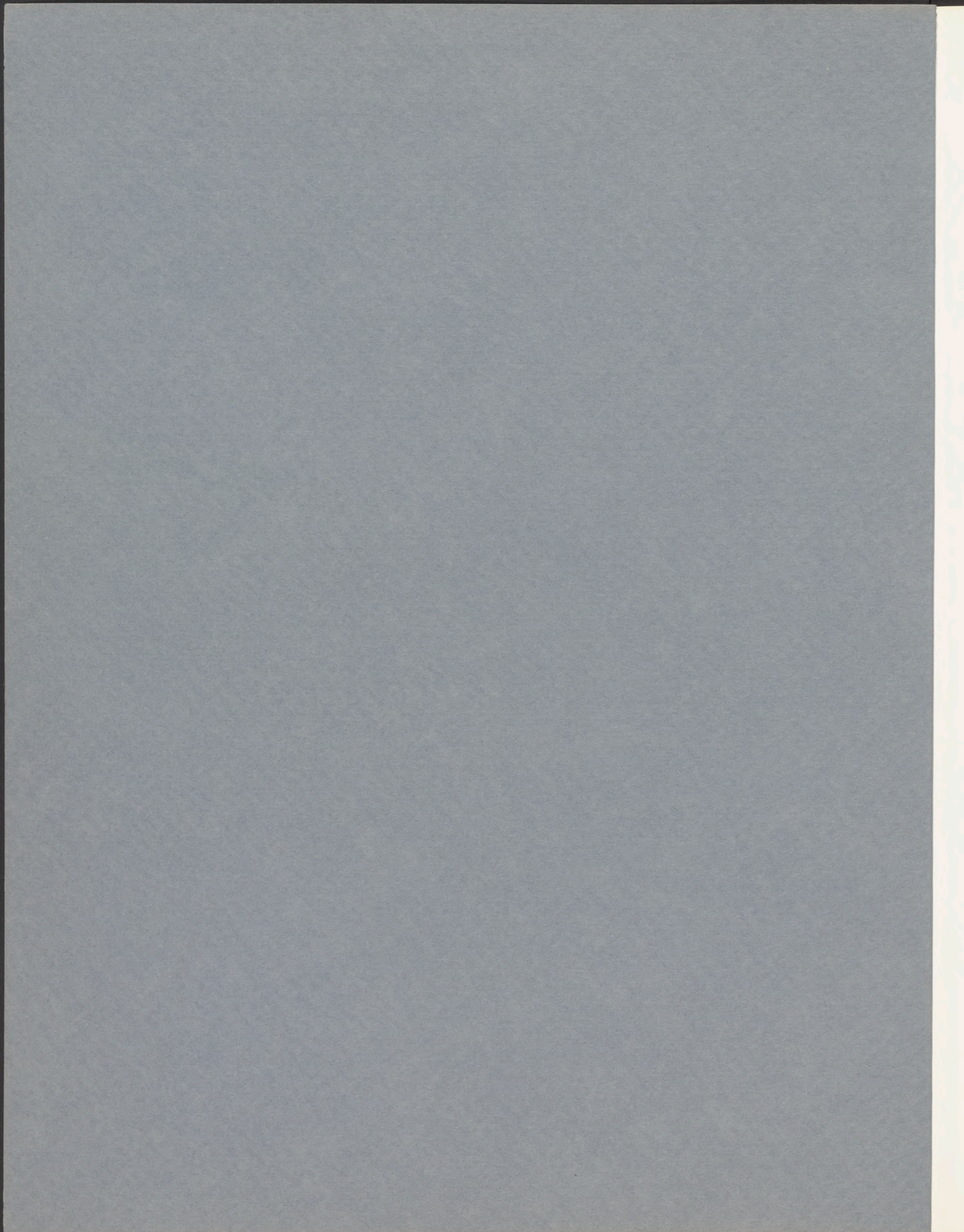


AVIGDOR ARIKHA

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D.C.



AVIGDOR ARIKHA

Twenty-two Paintings 1974-1978



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June 15 — August 26, 1979

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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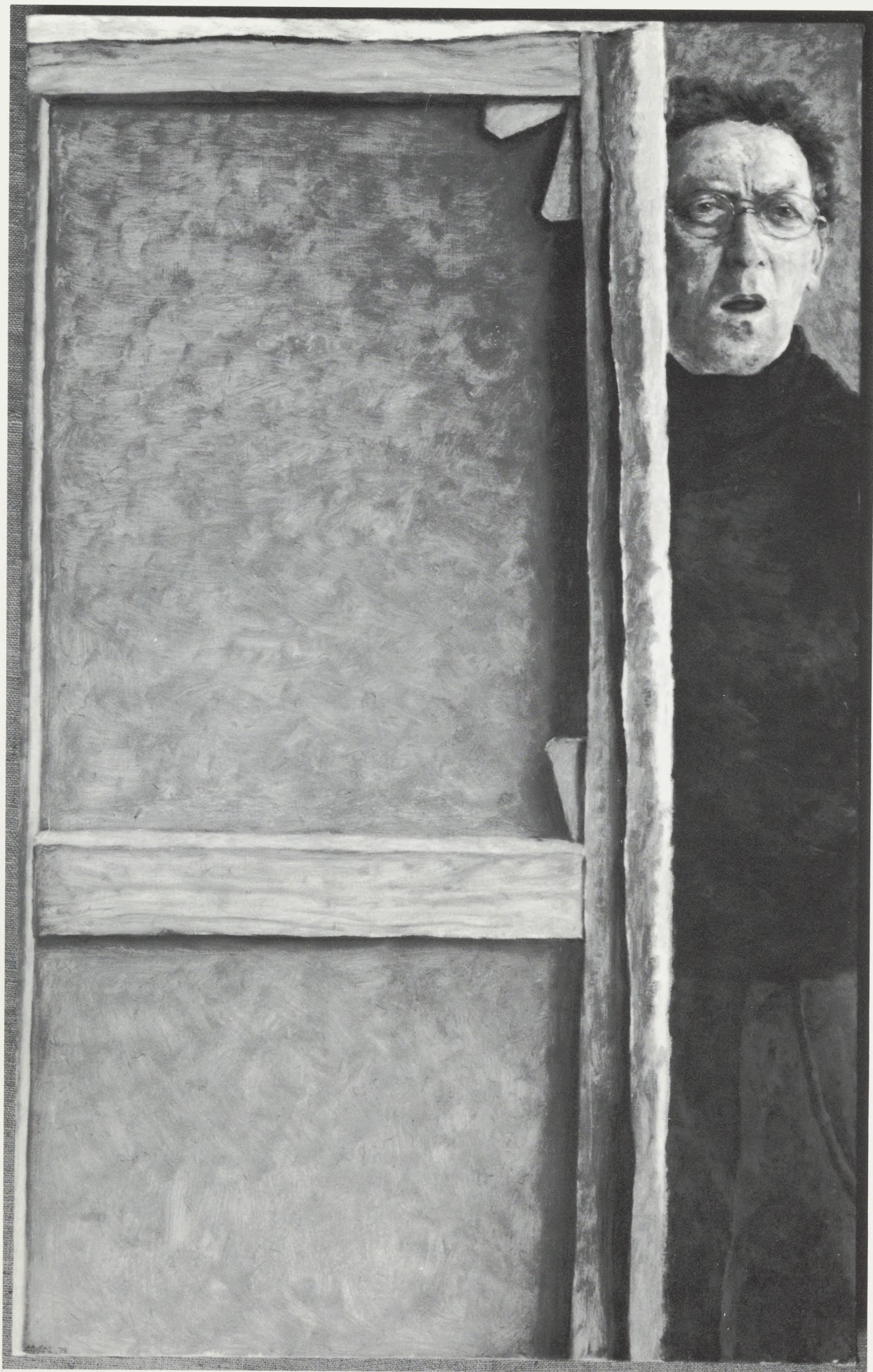
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Assistant Curator Frances Fralin has coordinated the catalogue documentation; Pamela Lawson, Virginia Delfico and Susan Williams have participated in various ways in the development of the exhibition and the catalogue. Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York, and Marlborough Fine Art, (London) Ltd. have contributed both to the catalogue and the execution of the exhibition. Special thanks go to Gilbert Lloyd, London; the lenders to the exhibition; and above all to the artist, who has collaborated in every phase of the exhibition and catalogue preparation.

J.L.



22. SELF-PORTRAIT STANDING BEHIND CANVAS 1978
45 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.; 116 x 73 cm.

One of the results of decades spent in investigating the various possibilities of abstraction in visual art has been an inevitable move into the reflexive mode. Entropy prevails; art seems more and more to feed upon itself; it is so often its own subject that indeed for many of us painting per se, as we have progressed through the seventies, has become less interesting than photography. Photography was of course in the previous period viewed in its very immediacy as a sub-aesthetic medium. (Our definition of high aestheticism changes along with other preoccupations.) It has taken some time and reflection to figure out the causes of the general heightened interest in photography and the concomitant lack of energy in most "photographic" painting. Oddly enough, we are helped in this search for understanding by the work and the ideas of the painter Avigdor Arikha, who has nothing to do either with reflexive abstraction or with photography. Arikha is perhaps somewhat distrustful of photography; he disparages the practice of painting from photography. He paints from life; and moreover, he paints each of his lucid, vibrant canvases in one sitting. He is literally making immediate art; and he insists anyway that all great art is immediate, not mediate, not mediated. The painting from other painting, or from photographic imagery, mediates between the aesthetic and the directly experiential; Arikha's work, in contradistinction to art that is primarily delectative, can be said to give us new vision, and even, thus, new experience, directly through the artist's contact with his own sensory life. It is no surprise to learn that Arikha grasped the lesson of Caravaggio as a sort of epiphany: Caravaggio's imperious, absolutely confident synthesis of given natural appearance and dramatic contrivance, forming a transcendently fresh, immediate art — this affected Arikha so powerfully that abstraction became a superfluous issue for him. Ironically he found himself, and his subject, through other painting: what he had wanted all along was a way of connecting simply to immanence.

There is a strong tendency of "modernism" — within which lingers a kind of self-consciousness, a consciousness of dialectical history — to turn in upon itself. Modernism wants to be literal; it abhors "illusionism" but courts the teleological. Arikha has found a way out of modernism's circular dilemma; through an innate faculty for seeing in historical perspective, he combines the use of traditional methods with a radical, or a paradoxically ahistorical, approach. Oddly, he came directly out of Cézanne; at least, Cézanne was a compelling early influence. One might say that Arikha began with Cézanne as others might typically begin with lesser, or less complex, painters. Having assimilated Cézanne early, Arikha has moved quite rapidly toward his own acts of exorcism, reassimilation, and finally,

transcendence of his first key source in art. It is important to emphasize that not all of the artist's sources reside in art; Arikha's polymath temperament helps him to transcend the mimetic both aesthetically and intellectually. Arikha is an inveterate seeker after knowledge: he wants not simply to produce works of art, but to understand his context, his precedent, his own impulse. In a letter written in October 1978, Arikha wrote,

In our time styles have changed rapidly, but their successive oppression has not lessened. Stylistic oppression is not a lesser menace to the individual in urge of telling his truth, than to a nation. . . . The oppression exercised by a collective or official style, brushes away opposition in much subtler ways than any government could do. Who in Assyria would have dared to sculpt differently from the official royal style? No such person could have practiced, and indeed, there is no such trace. But let's not be mistaken; the omnipotence of a collective style is not necessarily the emblem of a tyranny such as Ashurbarnipal's, or of a dictatorship such as Stalin's. The collective style is in itself a dictatorship. It is well illustrated in the empire of fashion which governs teenagers; no identity is permitted and the tyranny of their fashion is Time's immediate expression. In fact, time also has much subtler ways to inscribe itself. It is, in fact, unnoticed to begin with. Didn't one accuse Ingres of imitating Gothic painting, seeing in him something which was not there? And at the same time one did not notice what was Ingresque and new in Ingres. Novelty in art, that specific unrepeatable taste of one epoch, is to art what the taste of water is to water: one needs a very sensitive palate to distinguish between the waters of one or the other source (and ancient Greeks excelled in that). Wine is simpler, of course — and nevertheless, how difficult! The distinctness of a period is engraved through truth, from within to without, not through exteriority. But why did I say all that? Because to paint from life at this point of time demands both the transgression and the inclusion of doubt. Though I know that nothing is representable, that in fact it makes no sense to paint an appearance on one's canvas, I cannot resist the drive. Since I was taken by this hunger in the eye (1965), I submitted to strict observation. Not one dot was done without my being plugged in on observation. And I

notice with time, that as I get closer and closer to what I truly see, the truer the painting becomes, the more logically it organizes itself. The relationships on the painted surface unfold in an absolutely unpredictable way, and in a logic that I grasp in the course of painting, increasing my state of intensity. That the painting then organizes itself organically depends entirely on this very state of intensity I may be in. The lack of such a state of intensity will inevitably bring about failure. Hence the small number of my works.

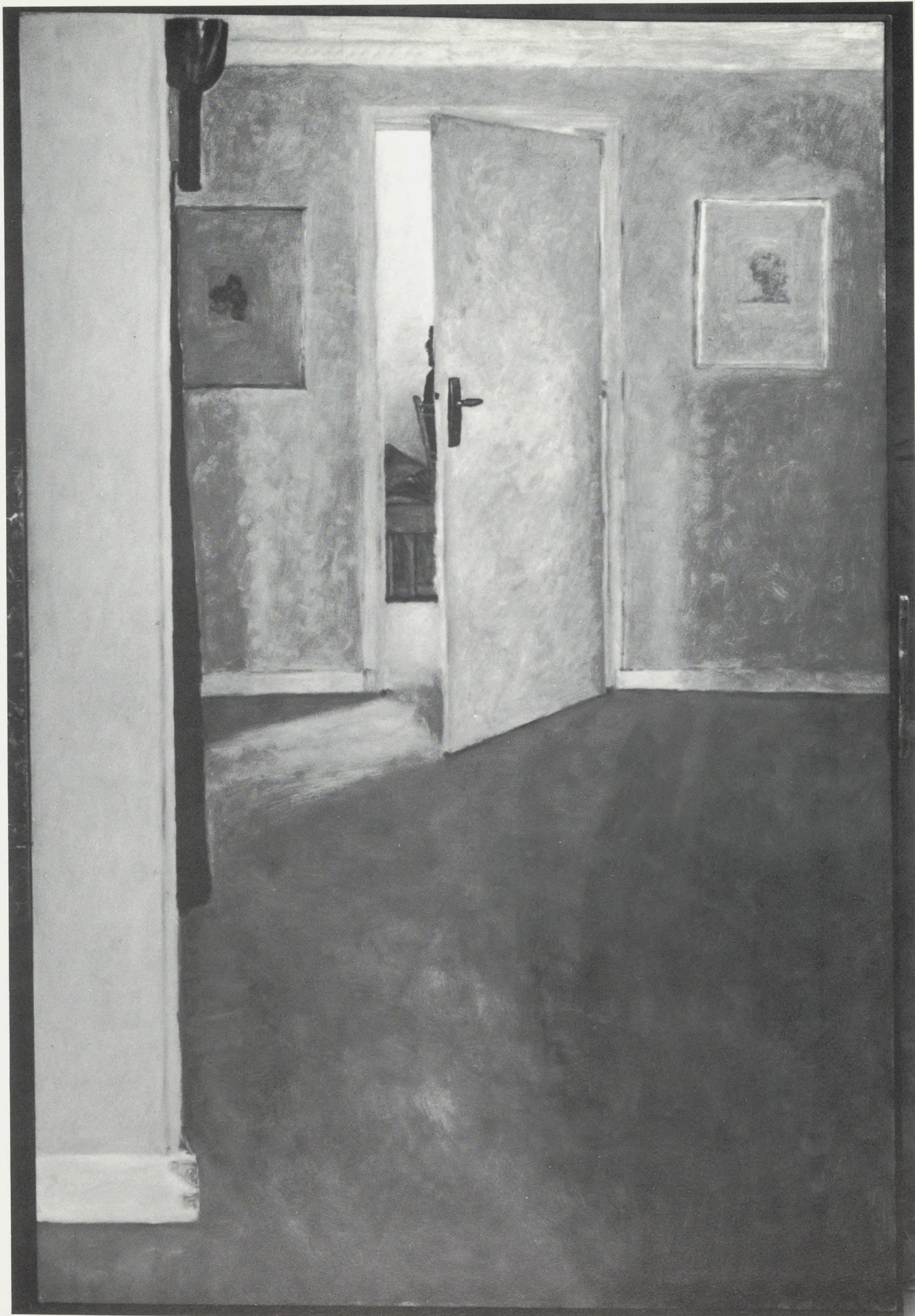
The ability of art to communicate directly relies partly on the artist's respect for the limitations of a given medium imposed by tradition. Arikha is acutely conscious of the properties and possibilities of oil paint applied with brushes to linen: he is wedded to the notion of material integrity. But this aspect of his activity is not an obsession — it is not a Bauhausian dictum, but instead a kind of healthy remembrance, an easy acceptance of cultural history. Arikha is acutely cognizant of technique as it has evolved historically — for instance, the uses of warm and cold color, as handled in turn by Titian, Rubens, Velasquez, David, Delacroix, Ingres. He said to me, standing before a Piero della Francesca canvas in London, "Look at this use of white. It creates the picture's structure. You build a painting, and you find you can warm up colors — you can't cool them easily later. But to make the white palette the center . . . this is the difficult thing." In this instance the artist was referring to a technical problem of painting. But one senses in his own work that physical tonality is a more than technical part of his special artistic persona. To make the pale range establish the psychological core of the picture, whether canvas or paper, or white pigment, is a desideratum which we come to see is essential to Arikha's art, whether in paintings, or ink drawings or watercolors. Pale or neutral tones establish a sort of anchoring membrane. His working in a single sitting, his not returning to build and to worry and to enrich, his letting value-lightness carry the psychological structure of the picture — these things are central to Arikha's special insight. Through a respect for physical exigencies, he is confronting the question of immanence.

Arikha wants to face squarely what he calls "this confusion about subject matter." It should be clear — though perhaps it isn't — that in his work any "subject" is really an excuse to make a painting. Yet the nominal subject is not any

the less authentic or compelling for this reason and it is certainly in his case far from arbitrary. It has to do with a possibility for immediacy. The adventitiousness implicit in the combining of the artist's subjective state of receptivity, with the universally legible identity of a given object, or particular constellation of formally juxtaposed spaces and things, is what makes this question of "subject matter" so problematic. How does one justify his choice of subject? What is its meaning, or its metaphor? Arikha transcends this problem of his own choice of subject on several levels, but primarily through his utterly sure understanding of the efficacious uses of form. There is a paradoxical character in his best paintings, of an oddly canonic, almost formularized order, coexisting with a profound naturalness. *Books* offers an example of the work which by simple virtue of its own nature obviates the issue of what it's "about." This painting represents a view of the artist's study in Paris, seen daily. As a composition, it becomes a clearly defined matrical structure, a sort of grid composition; its vertical and horizontal divisions create an overall sense of schema, much as in a musical composition. And yet this grid is indeterminate; it is not a system or principle, but a transposed reality. It is an immediate extrapolation from life itself, and it is perceived as such — even as we are simultaneously perceiving its nature as an abstractly ordered chromatic surface, with abstractly decipherable internal relationships. *Books* and the important landscape, *Mt. Zion*, are based on literal observation; they are scenes viewed through an ordered frame. The frame is, first, the area bounded physically by the rectangular limits of window or doorway, symbolizing the limits of vision itself. Second, it is an internally regulated structure. In these paintings we are presented with a familiar mode of visual binding.

But the still lifes present a somewhat different kind of synthetic solution: with works like *Baguette Viennoise*, or *Wrapped Asparagus*, one quickly grasps the sense of wholeness, or of a thorough gestalt, in "small" subject. Nevertheless, while these paintings are replete, satisfyingly unfragmented, they are not, as with Cézanne, intentionally momentous. They are a little provisional, slightly unassuming or, rather, unpretentious. Arikha's work doesn't necessarily want to create or to evince great archetypes or paradigms. It operates more subtly, and more naturally, than most consciously "major" art: its power is like the power of experienced life itself, in which "subject matter" is rarely — until later — the issue.

Jane Livingston



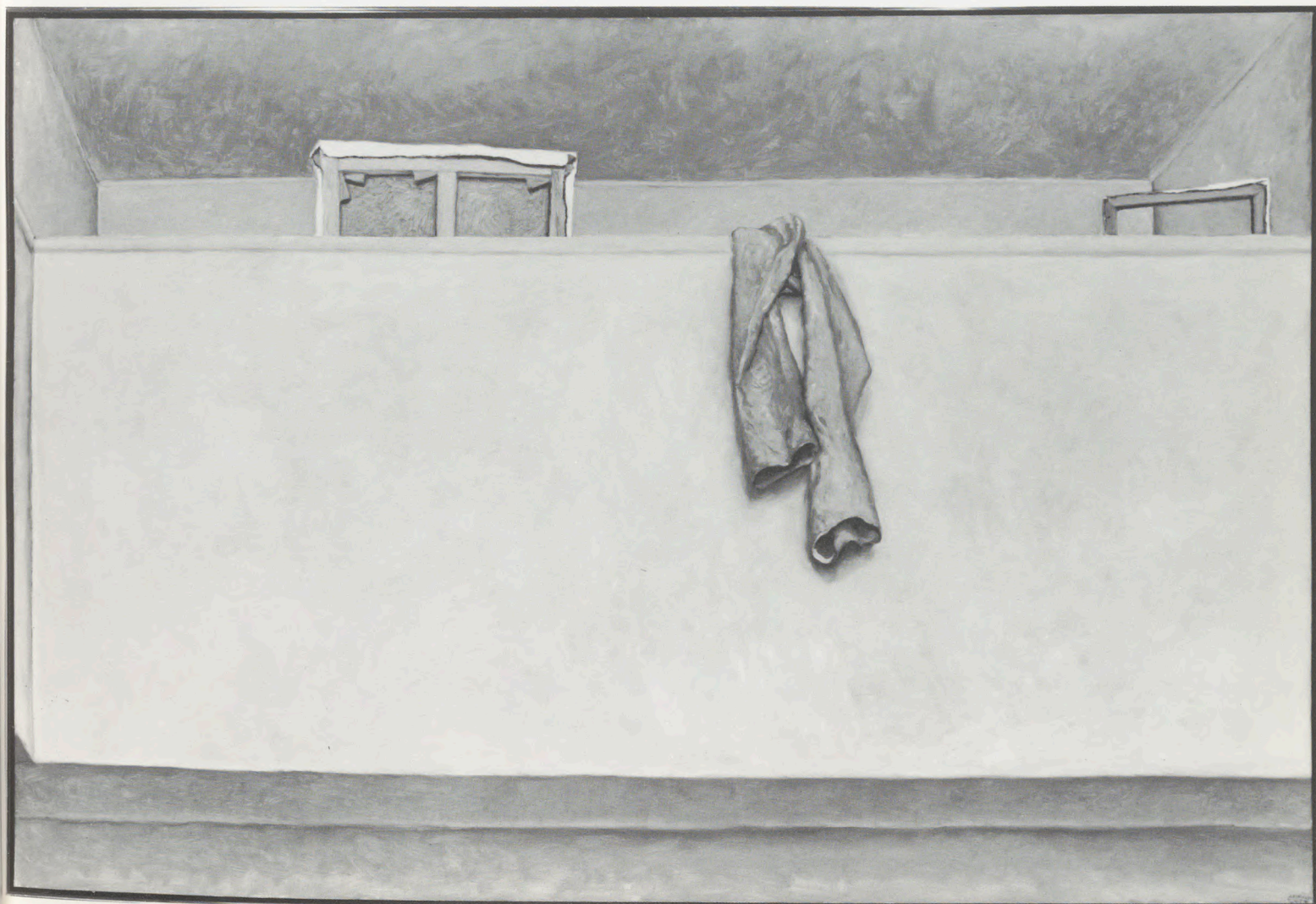
6. INTERIOR 1975
76 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.; 195 x 130 cm.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

All paintings are oil on canvas. Dimensions are given in inches followed by centimeters, height preceding width. Unless otherwise indicated the works were painted in Paris.

1. SHOES 1974
18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{5}{8}$; 46 x 55
Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Laub
2. HANGING BROOM 1974
45 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 35; 116 x 89
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
3. WRAPPED ASPARAGUS 1974
7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13; 19 x 33
Private Collection, Paris
4. POMEGRANATES 1974
8 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$; 22 x 35
Mrs. Richard Evans
5. GLASS OF WHISKY 1975
31 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{5}{8}$; 81 x 65
Collection Geraldine Nuckel
6. INTERIOR 1975
76 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$; 195 x 130
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7. SPANISH MIRROR AND CHAIR 1975
63 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{8}$; 162 x 130
Baronne Alain de Gunzburg, Paris
8. ANNE STANDING 1975
63 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$; 162 x 130
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
9. THE LOGGIA BALCONY 1975
51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$; 130 x 195
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
10. THE OLD TUXEDO 1975
57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 44 $\frac{7}{8}$; 146 x 114
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
11. BOX AND PITCHER 1975
28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{5}{8}$; 73 x 60
Sioma and Denise Schiff, London
12. FRUIT 1976
(Painted in London)
30 x 30; 76.2 x 76.2
Mrs. Frank Lloyd, Paris
13. MOUNT ZION 1976
(Painted in Jerusalem)
21 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$; 55 x 46
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
14. DR. M. SPITZER ON A HOT DAY 1977
(Painted in Jerusalem)
24 x 18; 61 x 45.5
Private Collection, Paris
15. ANNE LEANING ON A TABLE 1977
51-3/16 x 38-3/16; 130 x 97
Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York
16. NUDE BACK 1977
39 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{7}{8}$; 100 x 81
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17. BOOKS 1977
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20. ANDOUILLETTE DE VIRE 1977
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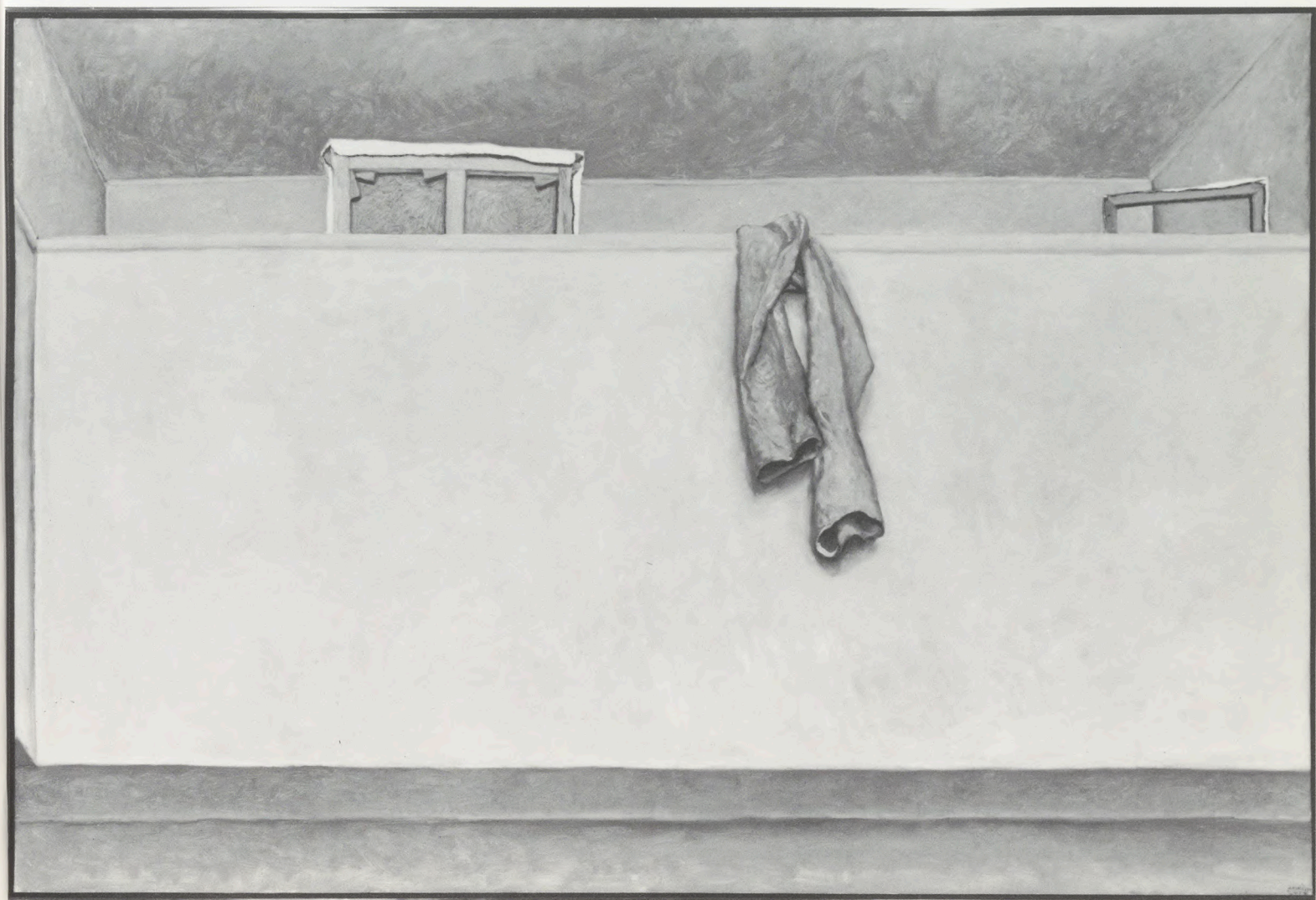


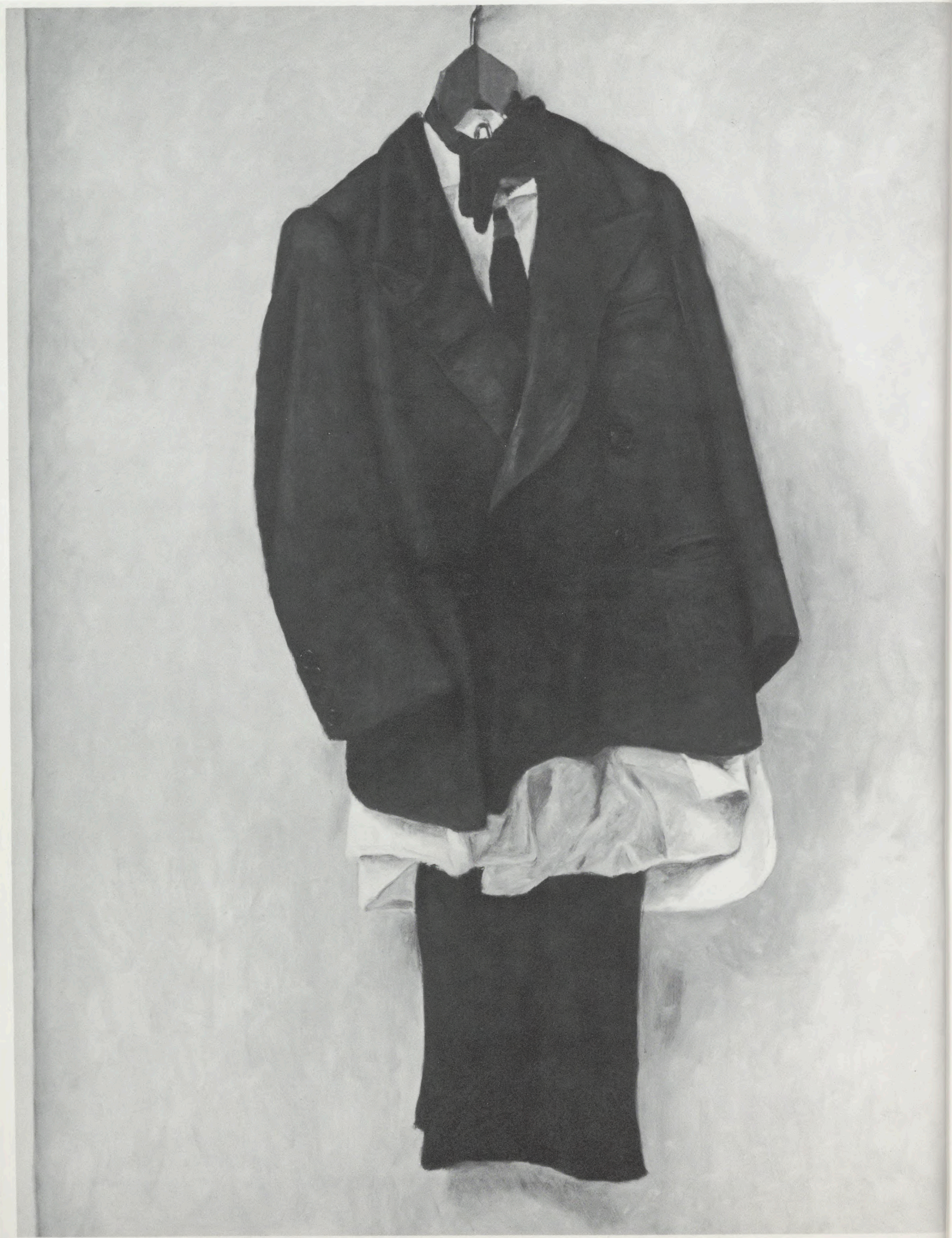
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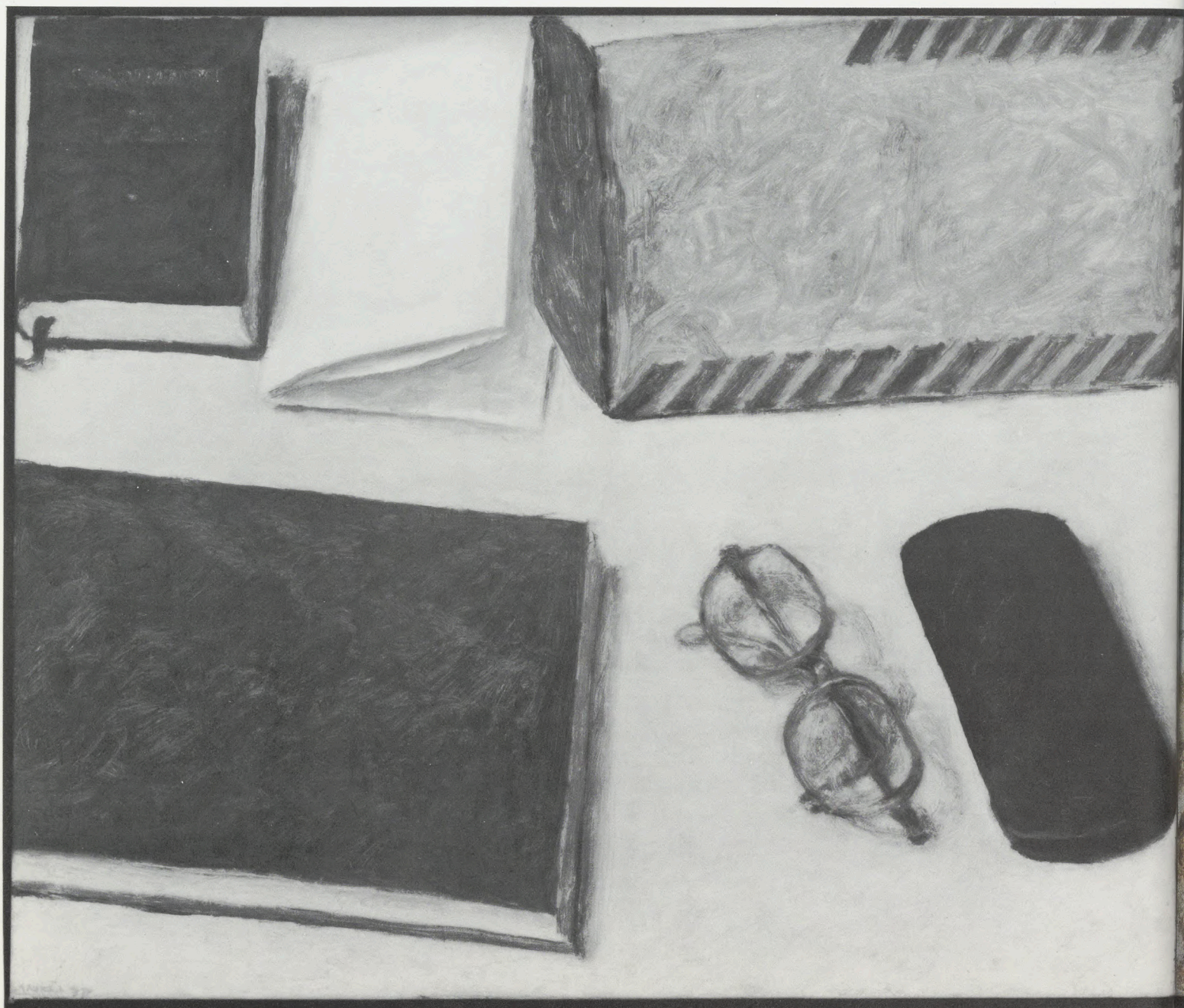
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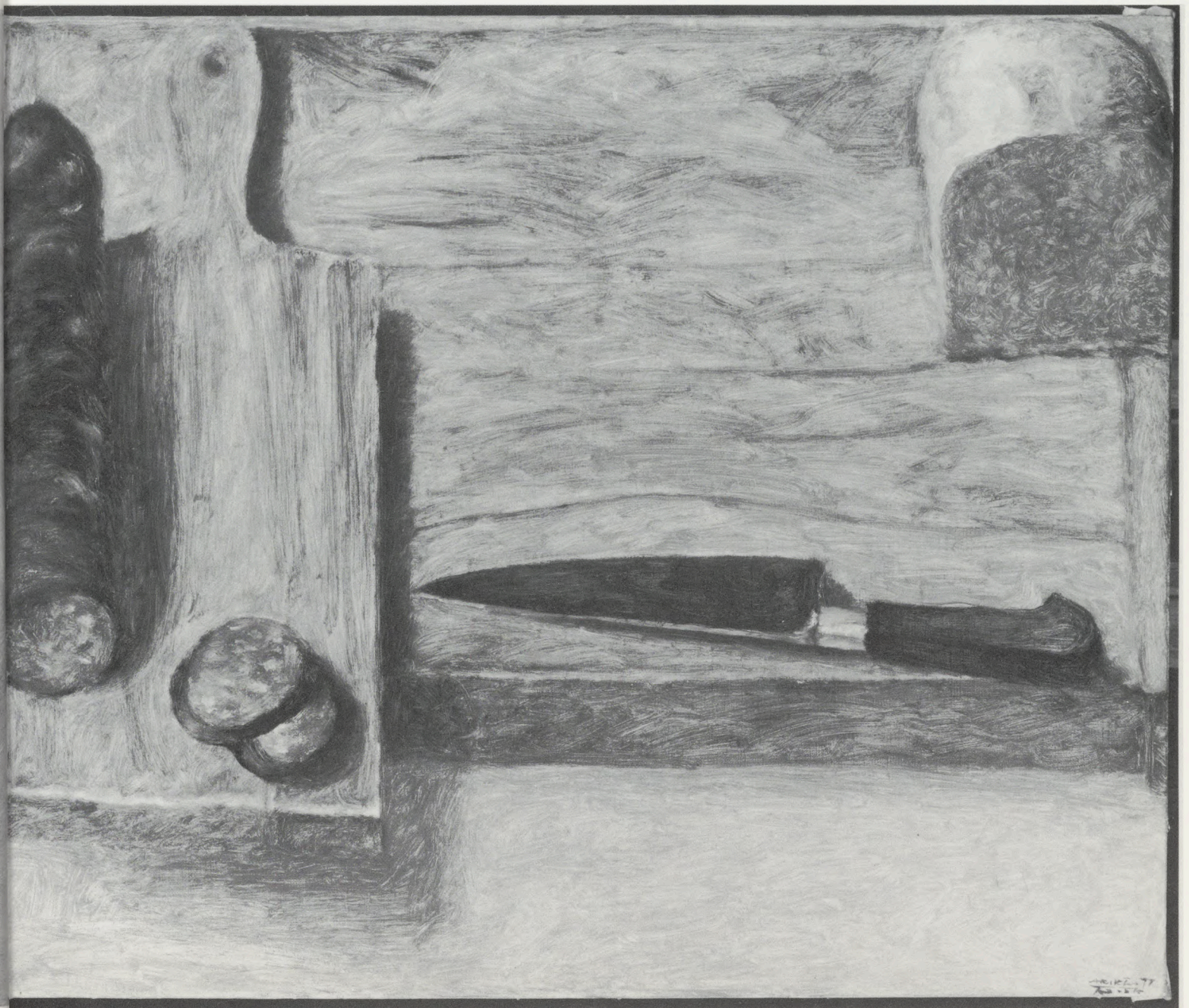




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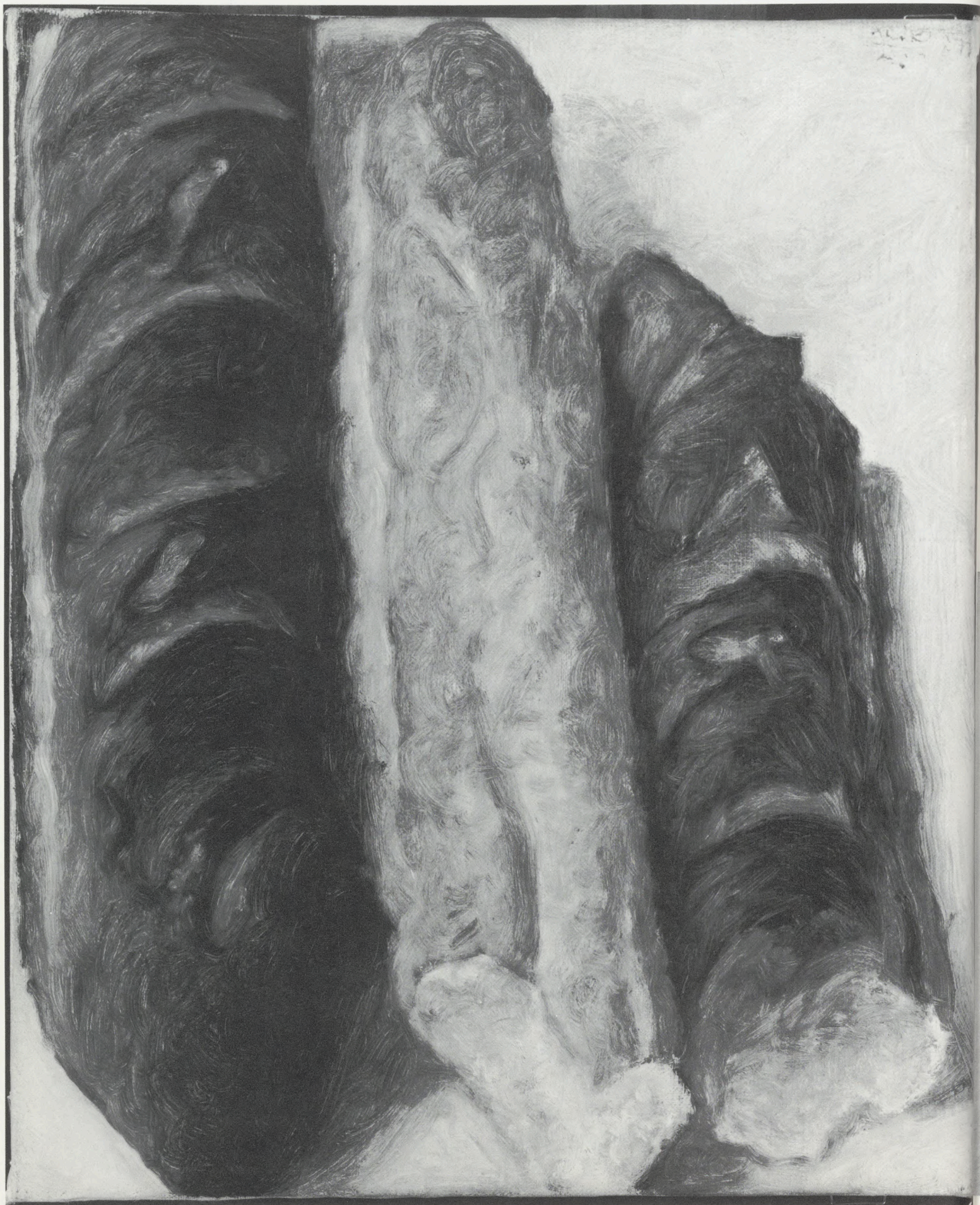


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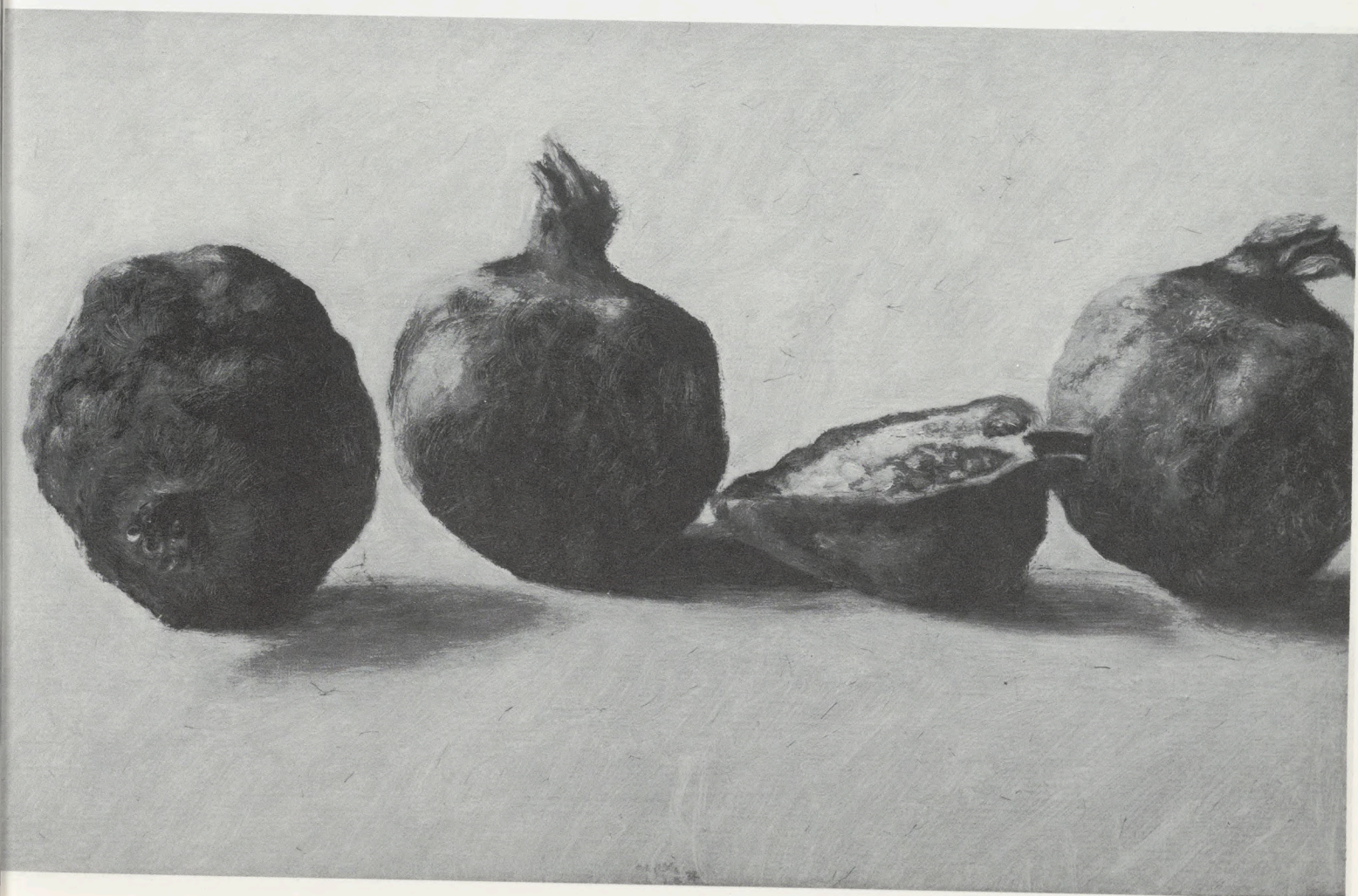
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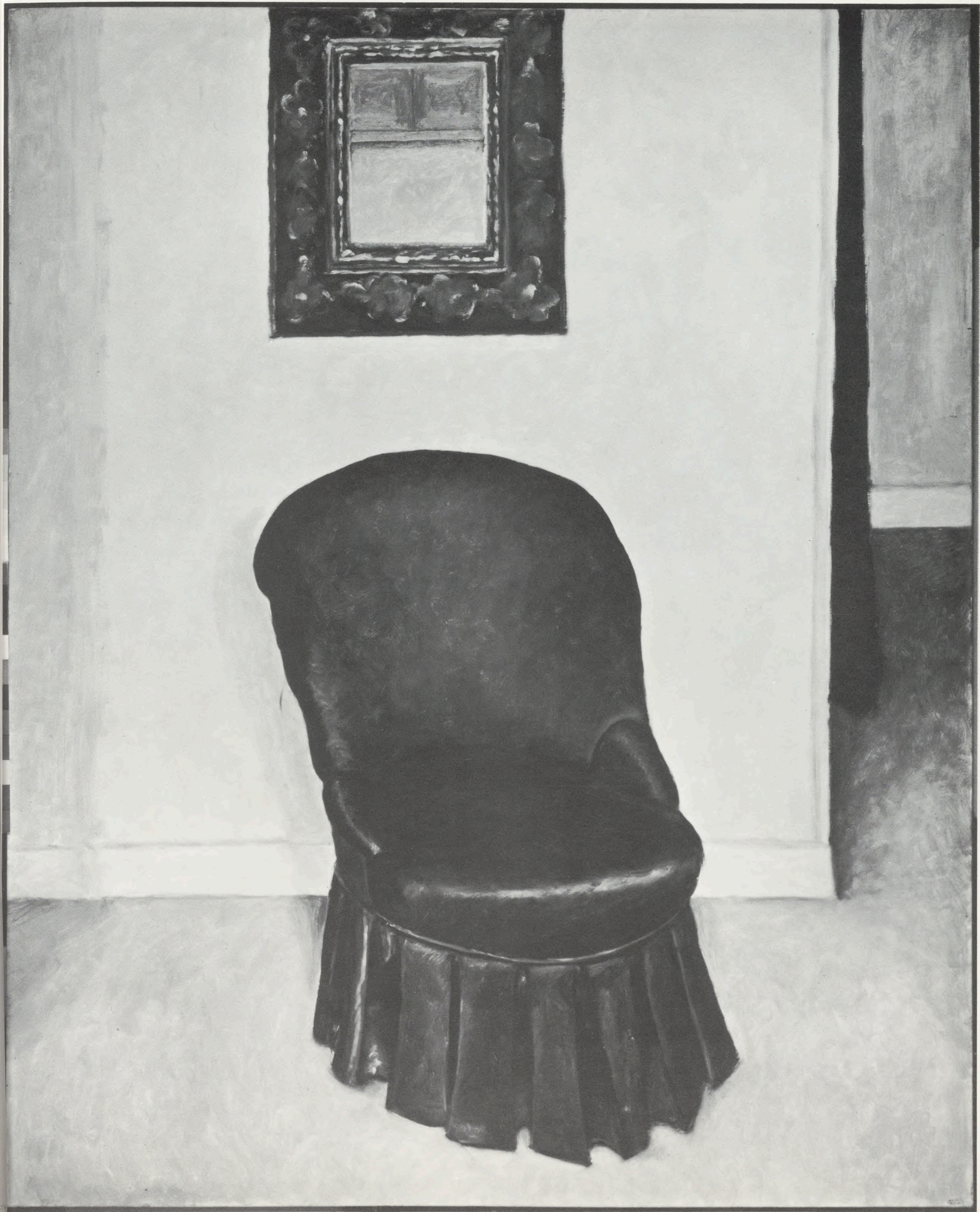
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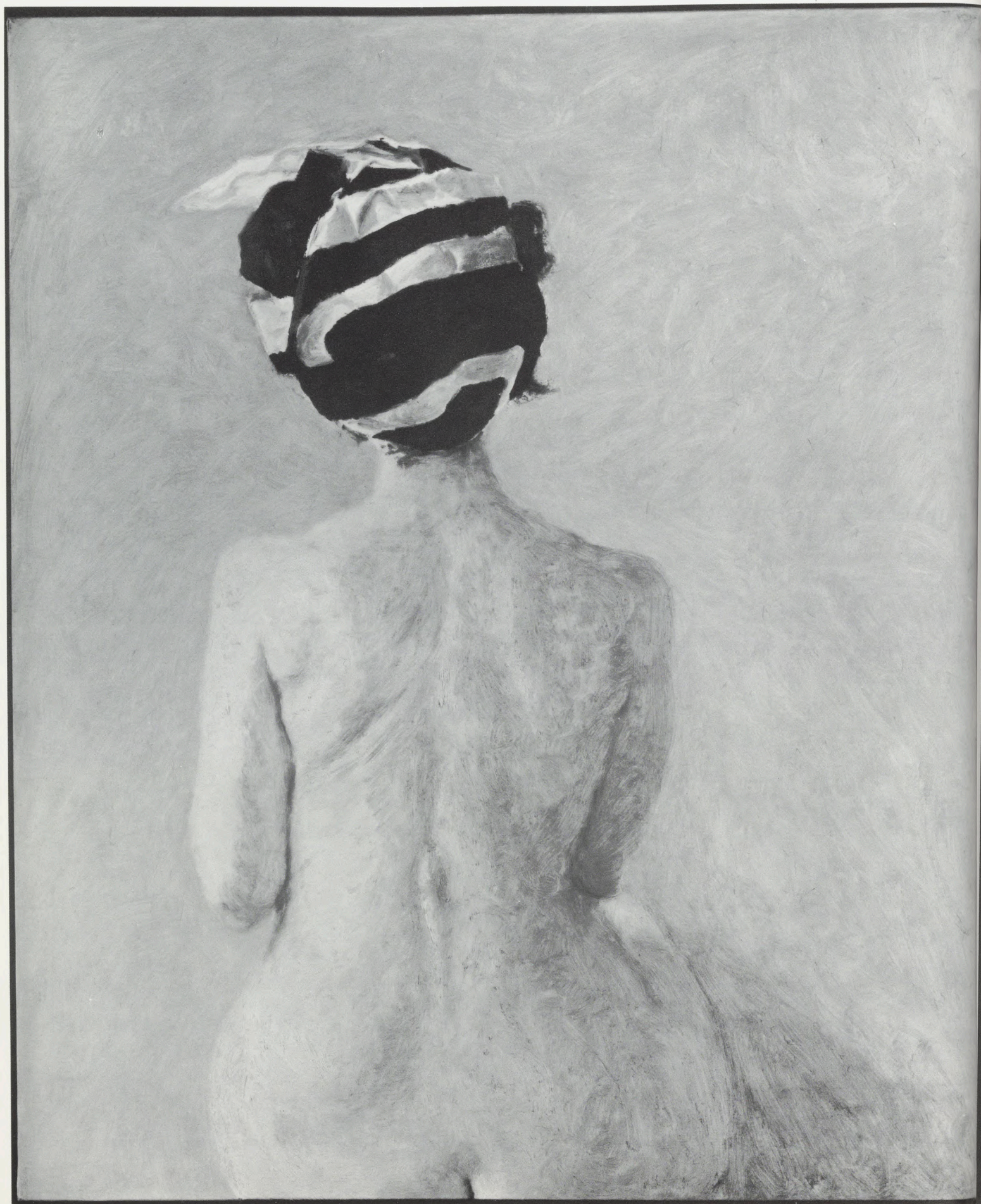


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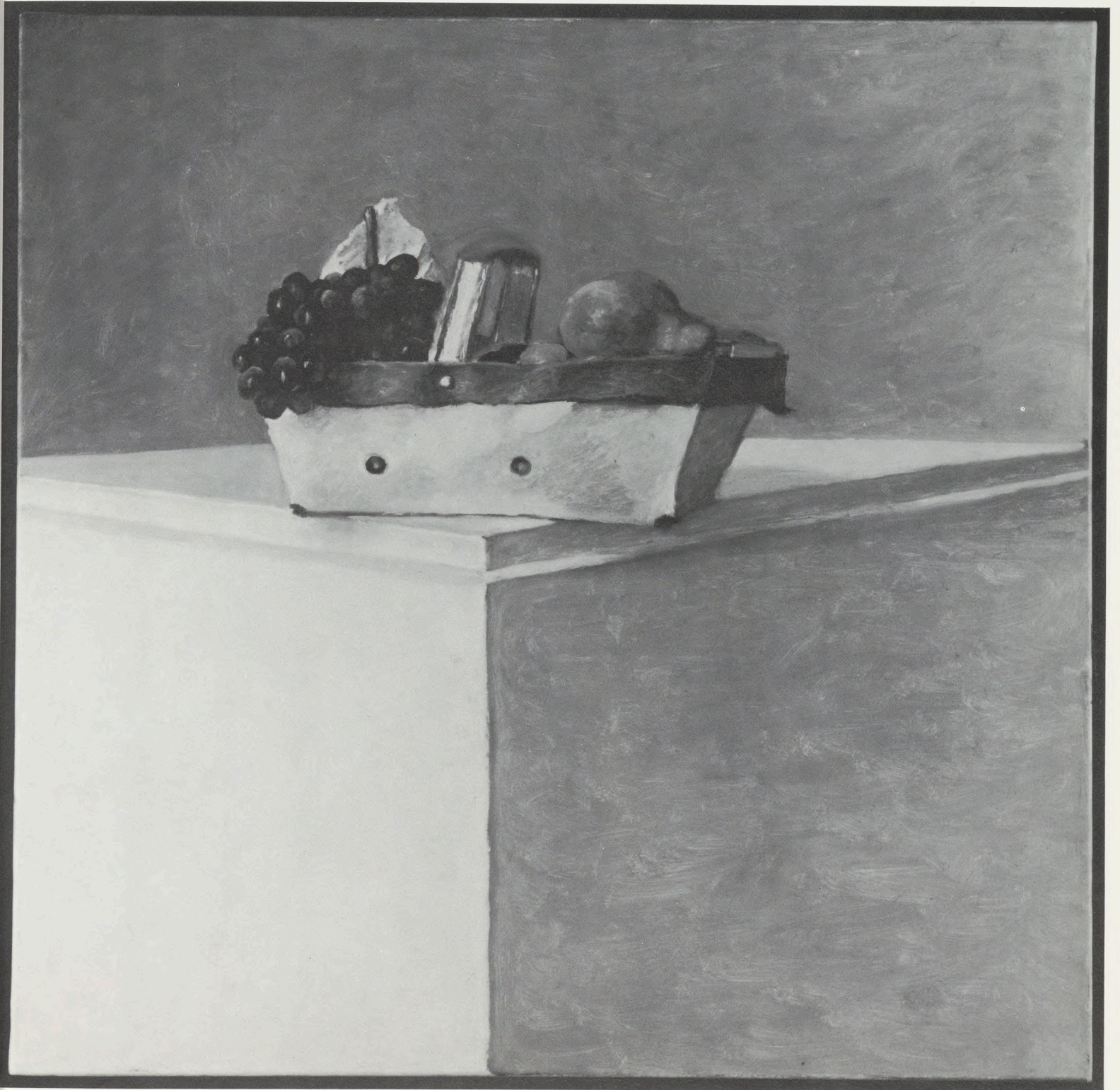
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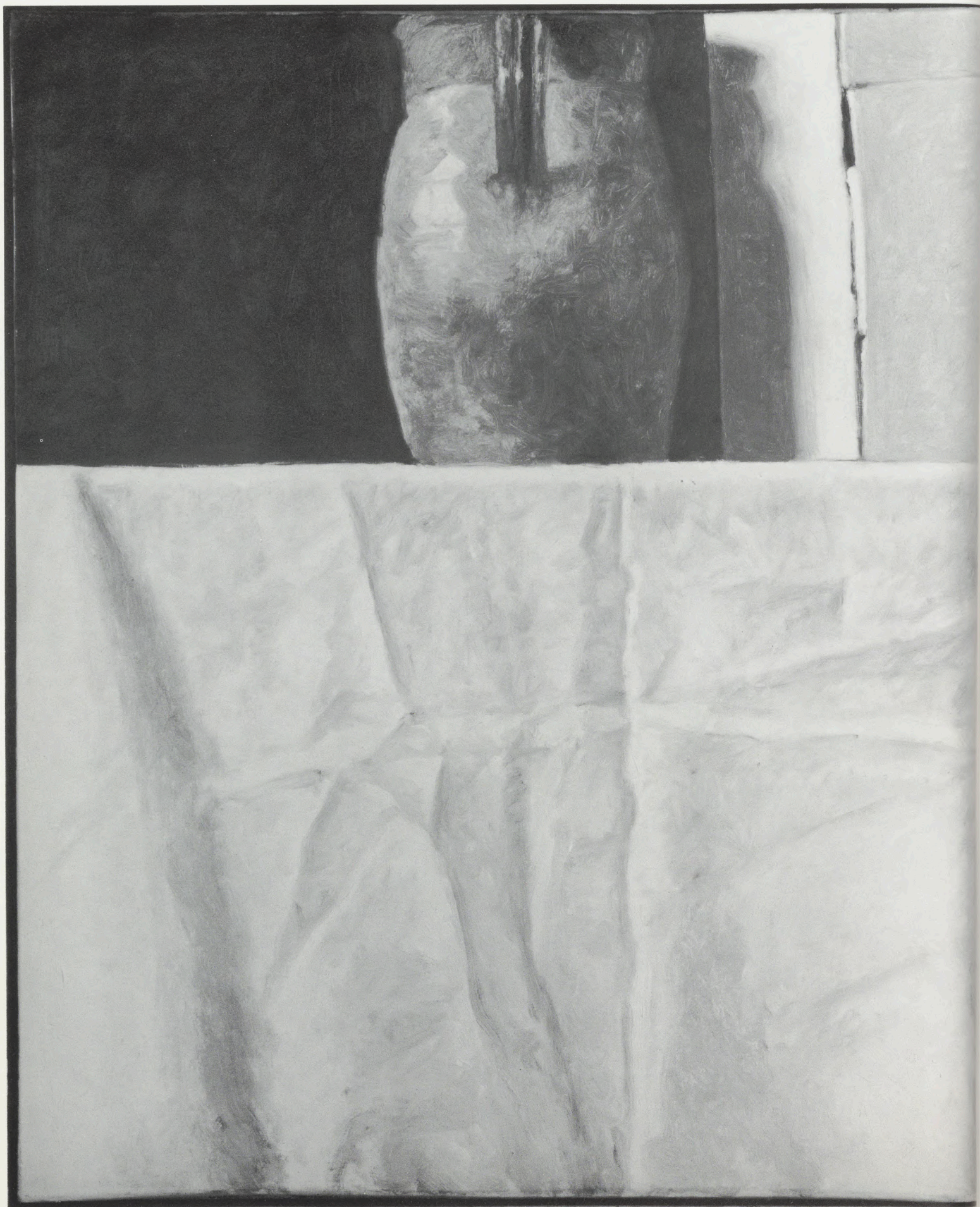
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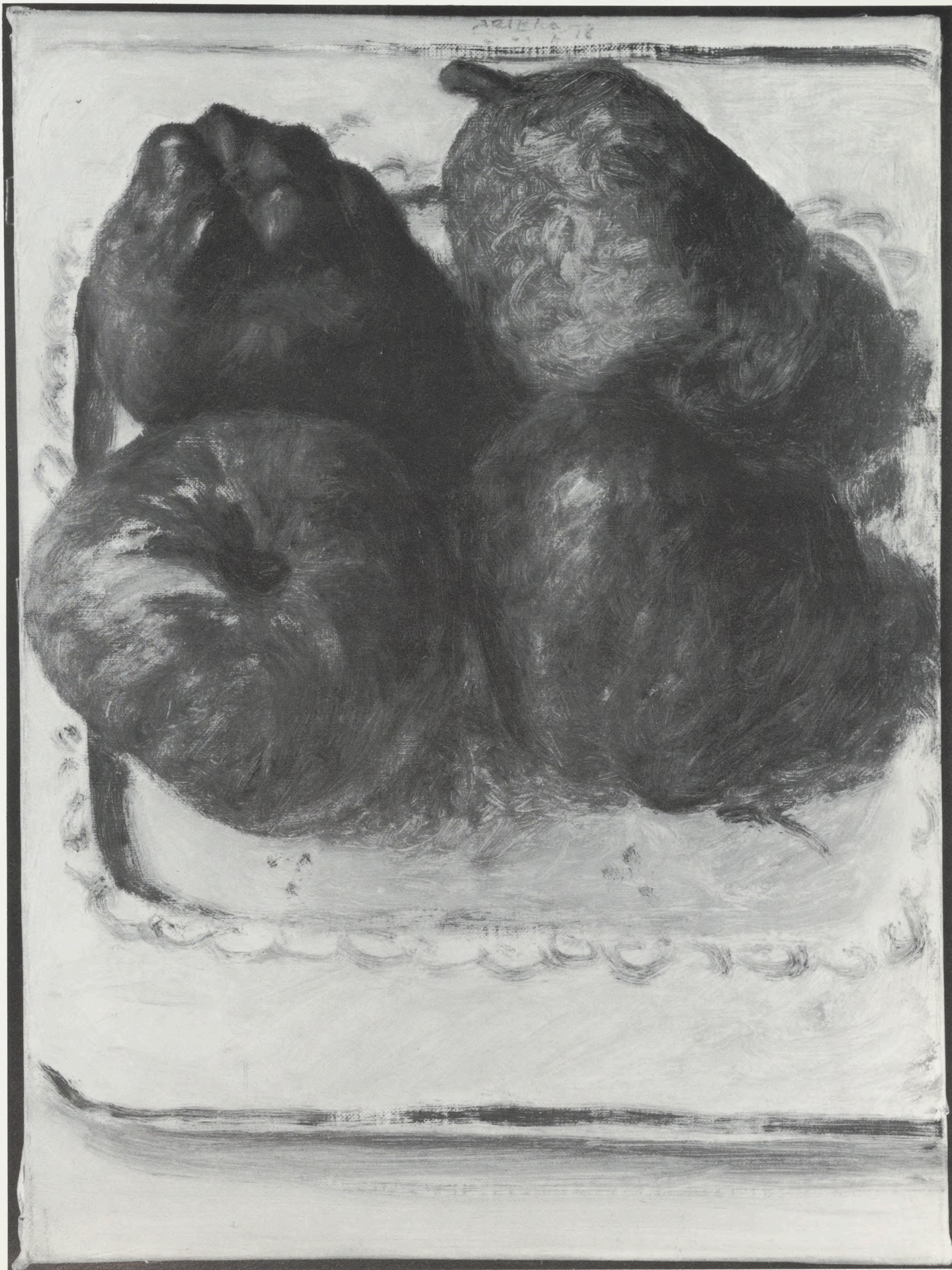
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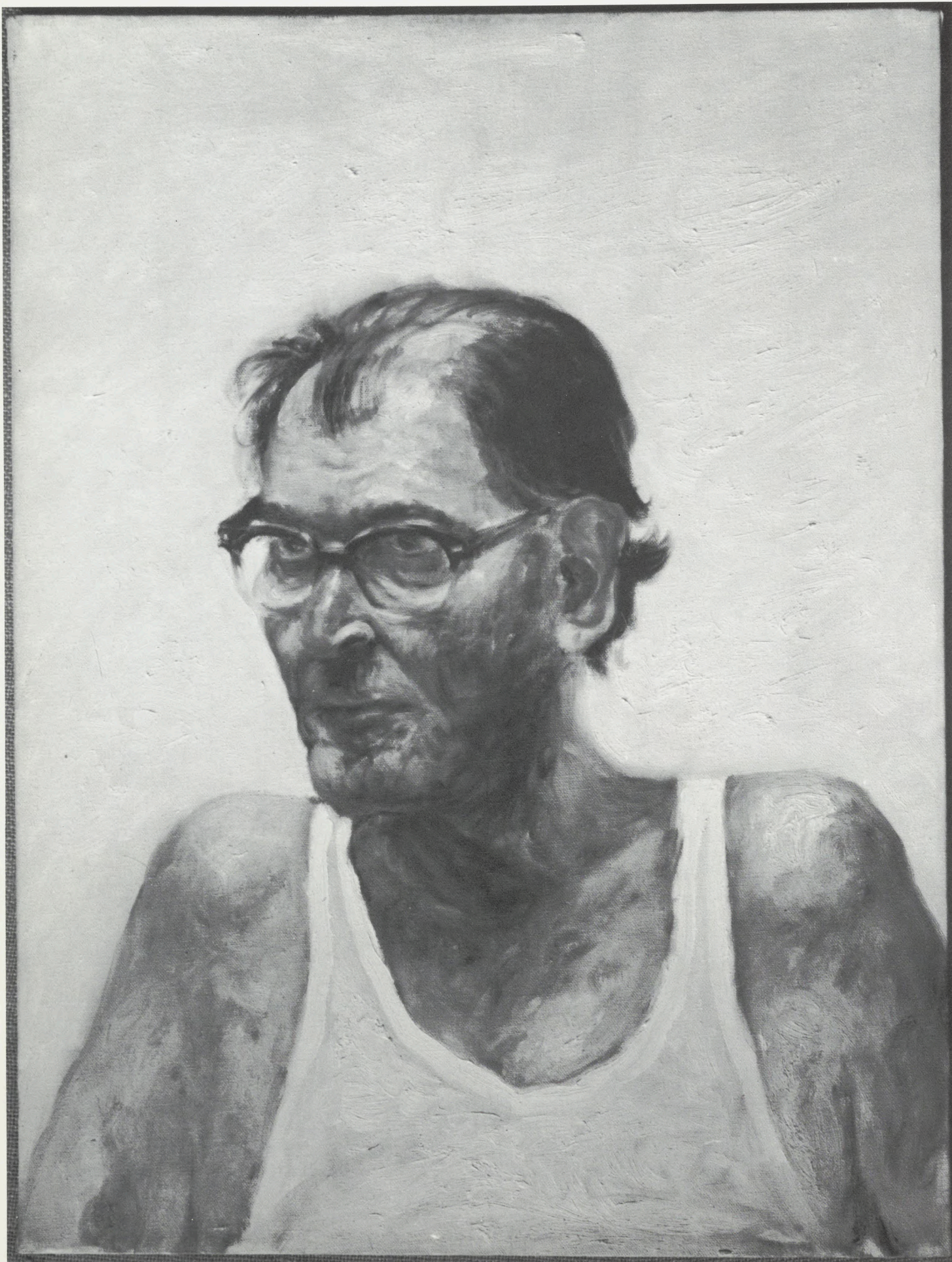
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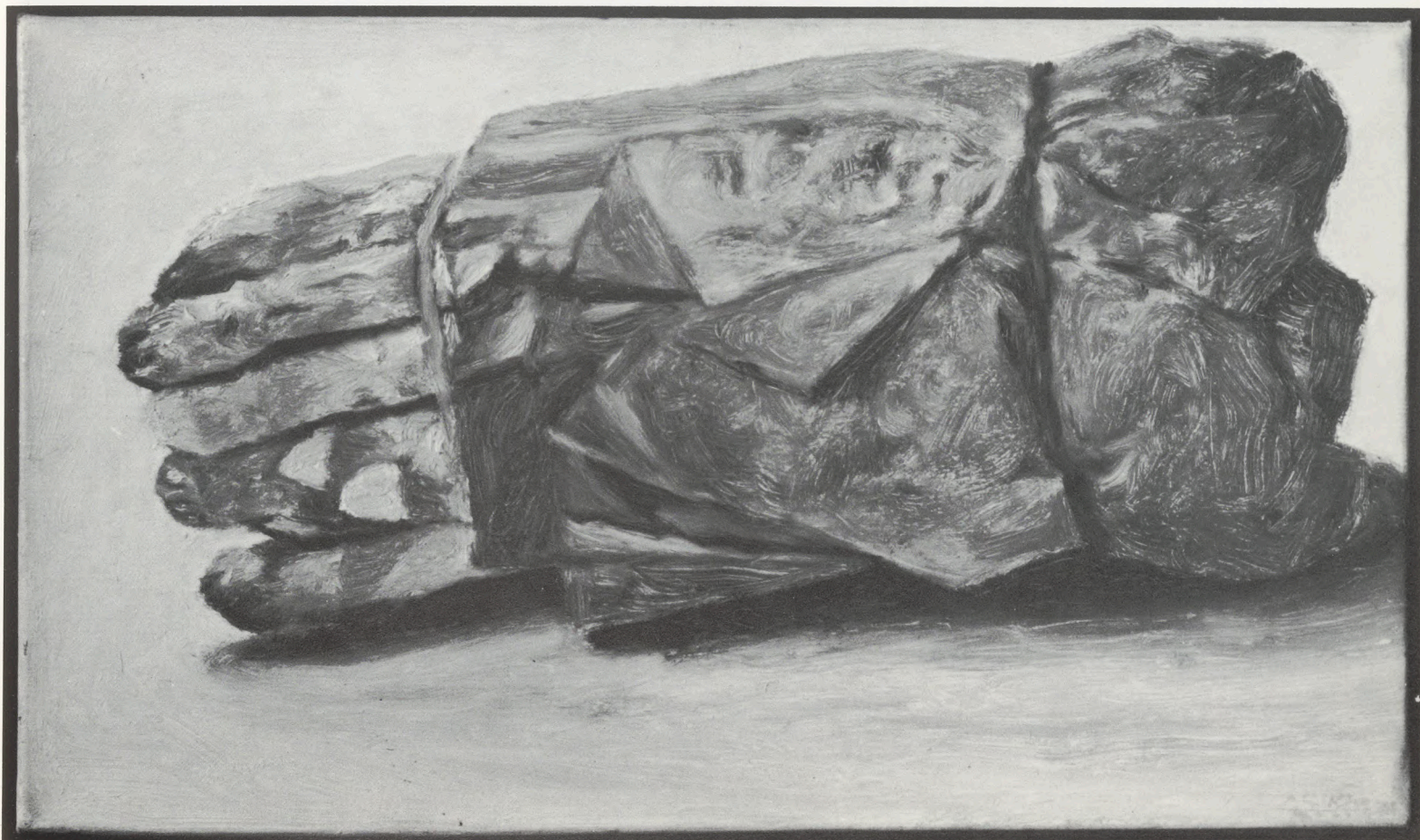
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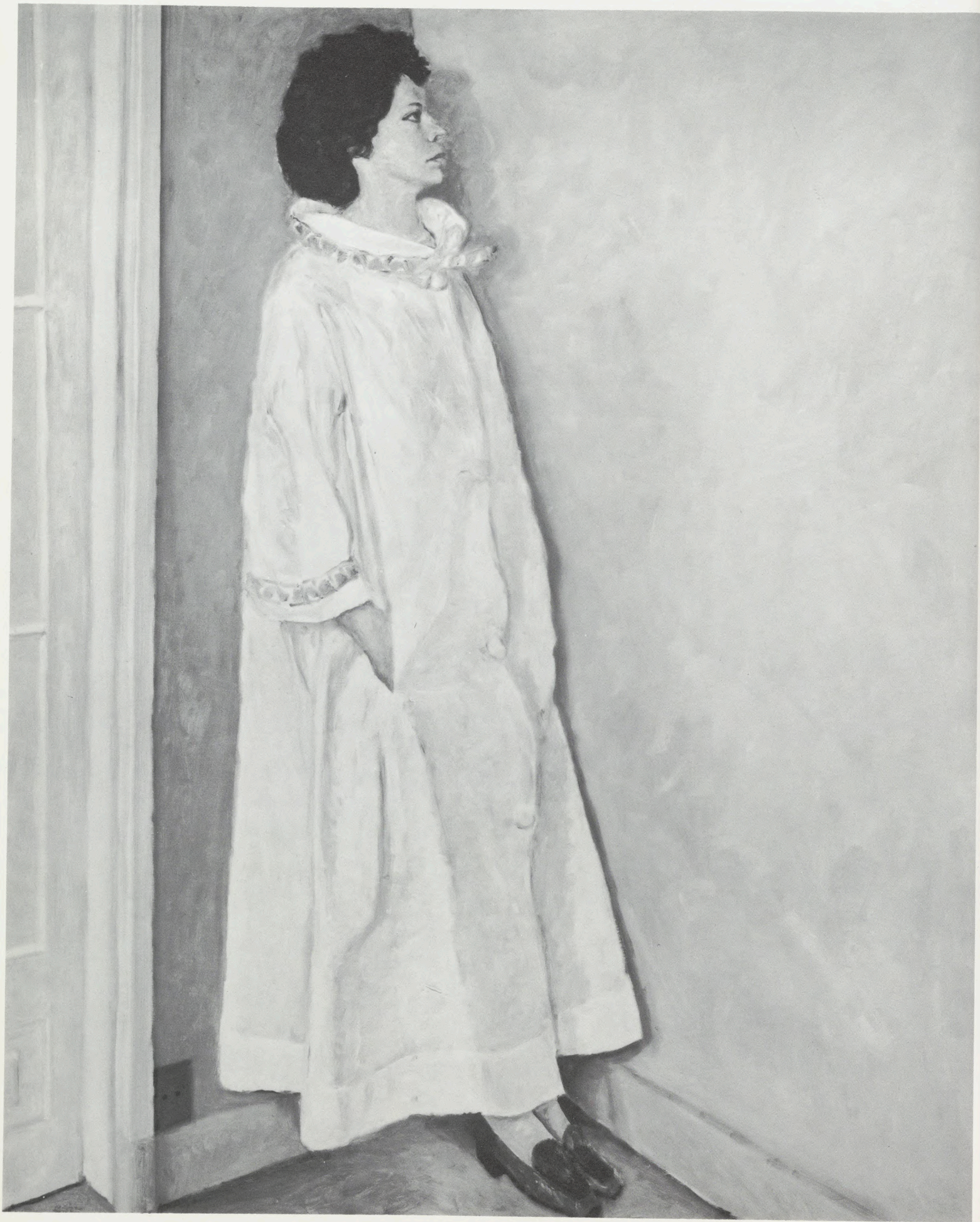
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7½ x 13 in.; 19 x 33 cm.



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63³/₄ x 51¹/₄ in.; 162 x 130 in.



AVIGDOR ARIKHA

Israeli, born Bukovina, Rumania (1929). Received Hebrew secular education. Drew and painted since childhood. Went through Holocaust. Rescued (1944) through his boyhood drawings made in deportation. Youth spent in kibbutz near Jerusalem. School, farm work, military training, and art studies (Bezalel) coinciding. Critically wounded in Israel's War of Independence (1948). Went to Paris, studied Ecole des Beaux Arts (1949-51). Figurative period. First exhibition: Tel-Aviv (1952). 1954 in Sweden, England, and back to Paris. Studied philosophy at Sorbonne. Work evolved into abstraction by 1957. From March 1965 experienced "a hunger in the eye" and restricted himself to drawing from life. Virtually no more painting except for a few last bursts in 1966 and 1968. During this period of crisis which lasted eight years until the start of his new painting in 1973 devoted himself, in addition to drawing and etching (pulling his own prints), to art historical studies, resulting in his being summoned by the French Minister of Culture to write an art educational reform program (1972). Invited to give curatorial course on drawing at the Cabinet des Dessins of the Louvre (1971). Conceived idea and wrote the catalogue for *Two Books*, Los Angeles County Museum (1972). Curated an exhibition at the Louvre around Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1978-79). Lives and works in Paris, returning periodically to Jerusalem.

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

- 1952 Tel-Aviv, Zeira Gallery
 1953 Jerusalem, Artist's House
 Jerusalem, The National Bezalel Art Museum
 1954 Stockholm, Galerie Moderne
 1955 Copenhagen, Athenaeum Kunsthandel
 Paris, Galerie Furstenberg
 1956 London, Matthiesen Gallery
 1957 Paris, Galerie Furstenberg
 1959 London, Matthiesen Gallery
 1960 Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum
 1961 Paris, Galerie Karl Flinker
 1966 Jerusalem, Israel Museum
 1967 Paris, Galerie Claude-Bernard
 1970 Paris, Centre National d'Art Contemporain
 1972 Los Angeles, California, Los Angeles County
 Museum of Art
 New York City, Marlborough Gallery
 Tel-Aviv, Gordon Gallery
 1973 Syracuse, New York, Everson Museum of Art
 Fort Worth, Texas, Fort Worth Art Center
 Museum
 Tel-Aviv, The Tel-Aviv Museum
 1974 Houston, Texas, Janie C. Lee Gallery
 London, Marlborough Fine Art
 1974-79 Circulating Exhibition of the Musée National
 d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, in France
 (27 cities) and Germany (three cities)
 1975 Paris, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque
 Nationale
 New York City, Marlborough Gallery
 1976 London, Victoria & Albert Museum
 1977 Zurich, Marlborough Galerie AG
 1978 London, Marlborough Fine Art
 Edinburgh, New 57 Gallery (Festival Exhibition)
 1979 Houston, Texas, Janie C. Lee Gallery

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1954 Milan, X Triennial
 1959 Paris, Biennial (First)
 1962 Venice, XXXI International Biennial Exhibition
 of Art/Venice

- 1964-66 "Art Israel," Museum of Modern Art circulating
 exhibition in the United States and Canada
 1967 Sao Paulo, Brazil, IX Sao Paulo Biennial
 1975 Los Angeles County Museum; St. Louis Art
 Museum; Madison, Wisconsin, Elvehjem Art
 Center, "European Painting in the Seventies"
 1976 Paris, Festival d'Automne, "Nouvelle
 Subjectivité"
 1977 Paris, Cabinet Graphique, Musée National d'Art
 Moderne, Centre Pompidou
 London, National Portrait Gallery, "New
 Acquisitions"

ARCHITECTURAL WORKS BY THE ARTIST

- Woonsocket, Rhode Island, 30 stained-glass windows,
 "Bnei Israel" Synagogue
 Jerusalem, six stained-glass windows, Municipal Council
 Hall
 Jerusalem, mosaic, Beit-Hahayal
 New York, John F. Kennedy Airport, stained-glass window,
 ELAL terminal

SELECTED ORIGINAL LIMITED EDITIONS BY THE ARTIST

- Sex litografier till Dvärgen* av Pär Lagerkvist, edition of 50
 signed and numbered copies, Sandbergs Bokhandel,
 Stockholm, 1954.
 Samuel Beckett, *L'Issue*, six color aquatints, edition of 154,
 Editions Georges Visat, Paris, 1968.
 Samuel Beckett, *The North*, three etchings, edition of 137,
 Enitharmon Press, London, 1972.
 Samuel Beckett, *Au loin un oiseau*, unpublished text with
 five aquatints, edition of 126, The Double Elephant Press,
 New York, 1973.
 Anne Atik, *Words in Hock*, one aquatint, the portrait of
 the poet (the painter's wife) printed by the artist, edition
 of 30, Enitharmon Press, London, 1974.
Facing Mount Zion, seven lithographs with text by the
 artist, edition of 113, The Gordon Galleries, Tel-Aviv, 1979.

SELECTED BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY THE ARTIST

Rainer Maria Rilke. *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornetts Christoph Rilke*. Hebrew translation, 35 pen drawings (1951-52). Tarshish Books, Jerusalem, 1953.

Ernest Hemingway. *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hebrew translation, six pen drawings. Am Oved, Tel-Aviv, 1953.

H. N. Bialyk. *Safiah*. 15 lithographs (1954). The Bialyk Institute, Jerusalem, 1955.

Samuel Beckett. *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*. Six pen drawings (1957). Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1958. Reprinted by Grove Press, New York, 1967.

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